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SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION: UNFPA SUPPORT TO "PARTNERS IN POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT"

I. SUMMARY

1. The Executive Board is requested to approve support for "Partners in Population and Development" through the recruitment and assignment of project personnel to the Partners' Secretariat as outlined in this report. The Partners in Population and Development is an intergovernmental organization established by ten developing countries (Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Indonesia, Thailand, Tunisia and Zimbabwe) to implement the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) regarding South-South cooperation.

2. In order to promote South-to-South cooperation in the field of reproductive health, a small Secretariat is being established by the ten Partner countries in Dhaka, Bangladesh. UNFPA, together with the World Bank and the Rockefeller Foundation, intends to provide financial support for the operation of the Secretariat. To facilitate the administration of the Secretariat, the ten countries have requested UNFPA to establish a trust fund mechanism. Furthermore, an arrangement is proposed for approval by the Executive Board to recruit and assign project personnel to the Partners' Secretariat.

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II. BACKGROUND

3. According to the ICPD Programme of Action, "The international community should urge donor agencies to improve and modify their funding procedures in order to facilitate and give higher priority to supporting direct South-South collaborative arrangements" (paragraph 14.16). The General Assembly, in adopting the report of the ICPD, recognized "the importance of South-South cooperation in the implementation of the Programme of Action" (resolution 49/128, paragraph 12). Consequently, UNFPA has been closely cooperating with developing countries in strengthening their substantive and logistical capacity to share with each other their successful experiences in the field of reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health.

4. The mandate for UNFPA to support this type of activities was specifically addressed by the Executive Board at its session in September 1995. In decision 95/37, the Executive Board approved the 1996-1999 intercountry programme (document DP/1995/44), which includes the promotion of South-South activities in the area of reproductive health including increasing the training capacity for trainees from other developing countries, helping training institutions to make educational support and other information materials available, promoting the production and marketing of reproductive health-related equipment, and assessing the role of the private sector in the area of reproductive health.

5. In 1994, UNFPA supported the launching of the Partners in Population and Development as a way of promoting training, research and the exchange of information among the ten developing countries mentioned above as well as between the ten Partners and other developing countries. As a result of consultations among developing countries, the Partners decided (at a meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia, on 1-2 August 1994) to put the initiative into operation. It was officially launched during the ICPD in Cairo, in September 1994.

6. UNFPA supported the organization of the first Board Meeting convened by the Partners in Harare, Zimbabwe, 19-20 April 1995, where the institutional framework and the 1995-1996 work programme of the Partnership were approved. The work programme is prepared by the Partners' Board, a body which comprises representatives from the ten countries, and is then proposed to donor agencies. The initial programme has been reviewed by UNFPA, in line with its guidelines and mandates. The major focus of the initial programme is on strengthening the capacity of developing countries to manage South-South collaboration, the promotion of "twinning" modalities (two-way experience exchange) and the development of training institutions, including Centres of Excellence. Technical cooperation will be tailored to the needs of the countries concerned and may include training (in the Partner country or in the collaborating country), specialized consultancies, internships and study tours. Specific areas of cooperation include policy design; quality of care issues; information, education and communication (IEC); programme management; family planning; prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS; and adolescent health.

7. In Harare, the Partners' Board also decided to establish a small Secretariat in Dhaka to provide technical and logistical support to the Partner countries in carrying out their work programme. This Secretariat will provide a central point for networking among Partners and for identifying opportunities for South-South exchanges and sources of financial support.

8. Following the Harare agreement, the Secretariat will have a Director (at L-6 level) and three professionals (at L-5/L-4 levels). Through direct interaction with interested developing countries, they will provide technical assistance in formulating and implementing projects that efficiently disseminate positive experiences in improving reproductive health. Their responsibilities will include the development of mechanisms for information exchange among the Partners and associated countries and organizations, strengthening the capacity of the Partners and other developing countries for South-South cooperation (particularly through their training institutions), and facilitating financial support from the international donor community for South-South activities. This professional team will be assisted by local administrative support personnel (one administrative officer, three secretaries and two drivers). The Secretariat's facilities and most of the utilities will be provided by the host country.

9. Following the request formulated by the Partners in Harare, a UNFPA trust fund will be established to serve as the channel to provide the resources required to support the Partners' Secretariat and its activities. Through this request, the Partners aim at taking advantage of UNFPA's administrative experience and its worldwide field network. The Partners acknowledge in their request that the trust fund resources will be spent and reported on by the Partners' Secretariat in accordance with UNFPA financial rules and regulations. UNFPA is now seeking to obtain funding for this trust fund. The Rockefeller Foundation is expected to provide approximately $1 million, while the World Bank and UNFPA have each pledged $150,000. UNFPA intends to provide its financial support under its intercountry programme.

III. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARTNERS' SECRETARIAT

10. Consultations with the Partners' Board have been held on the establishment of the Partners' Secretariat on the basis of agreements reached at their meeting in Harare. As a result of these consultations, it has been agreed that, subject to the approval of the Executive Board, UNFPA would recruit and assign project personnel to the Partners' Secretariat. The professional staff would serve as internationally-recruited UNFPA project staff. All of the staff would be subject to UNFPA staff rules and regulations. The proposed arrangement is analogous to that established for the Secretariat of the Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer. The Director of the Secretariat would be appointed by UNFPA, following consultations with the Partners. The rest of the Secretariat staff would be appointed by UNFPA following consultations with the Director.

11. The arrangement proposed above would be valid for a two-year period starting 1996. This would be periodically reviewed and subsequently renewed on the basis of mutual agreement between the Partners and UNFPA.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

12. The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve the arrangements to support "Partners in Population and Development" through the recruitment and assignment of project personnel to the Partners' Secretariat, as outlined in this document.